

When Likeness Goes with Liking: The Case of Political Preference

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Three studies show that people tend to vote for politicians (i.e., either Romano Prodi or Silvio Berlusconi in Italy or George W. Bush or John Kerry in the United States) whose traits they rate as being most similar to their own. People perceived higher similarity between themselves and political figures with respect to traits that were most distinctive of each platform and their respective leaders. These findings, while corroborating the similarity-attraction relationship, further attest to the role that personal characteristics of both voters and candidates play in orienting political preference.

KEY WORDS: Big Five, personality, politics, similarity

A considerable amount of research corroborates the hypothesis that individuals are most attracted to others who are similar to themselves (Byrne, 1961, 1971; Newcomb, 1961, 1978). The similarity-attraction relationship has been documented for a variety of characteristics, such as demographic variables (Tsui, Xin, & Egan, 1995), values (Meglino, Ravlin, & Adkins, 1992), attitudes (Berscheid & Walster, 1978), traits (Kurtz & Sherker, 2003), and beliefs (Turban, Dougherty, & Lee, 2002). Moreover, this effect exists in many domains of functioning, including physical attractiveness (Albright, Kenny, & Malloy, 1988), friendship and

acquaintanceship (Watson, 1989; Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000), quality and duration of relationships (Carli, Ganley, & Pierce-Otay, 1991; Keller, Thiessen, & Young, 1996), supervisors' ratings of performance (Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993), and political preferences (Bailenson, Garland, Iyengar, & Yee, 2006). The similarity-attraction hypothesis has gained further support across different cultures (Bond & Smith, 1996), using either experimental or correlational approaches and focusing on both actual and perceived (or assumed) similarities (Cronbach, 1955).

Although scholars do not fully agree on the mechanisms that lead individuals to be attracted to similar others, most explanations draw upon ideas from social, cognitive, and evolutionary psychology. One classic social psychological explanation is that being attracted to others because of actual or perceived similarities may meet a variety of needs, such as personal coherence, belonging, and control over the environment. People also may like others who share their same preferences, proclivities, and aversions to be consistent and to maintain a balanced state among feelings and cognitions (Heider, 1958). Moreover, people may like others with similar habits, attitudes, interests, and beliefs because those shared attributes reaffirm and validate one's own (Fiske, 2004). Some scholars have proposed that there are genetic mechanisms involved in detecting kin that may lead people to affiliate with others who are similar to themselves, not only at the phenotypic level, but at the genotypic level as well (Dawkins, 1976; Hamilton, 1971; Rushton, 1989).

Although most studies on the similarity-attraction relationship have been conducted in an effort to understand romantic attraction, friendship, and affiliation, the similarity-attraction relationship has important implications for political psychology as well (Bailenson et al., 2006; Crano, 1997; Lehman & Crano, 2002; Leitner, 1983; Piliavin, 1987). Such studies tend to focus on attitudes, revealing that voters prefer candidates with attitudes that are similar to their own. Crano (1997), for example, showed that voters' preferences for president in the U.S. election of 1972 were associated with perceived similarity between the candidates' position on several policy issues—such as government-guaranteed jobs or legalization of marijuana—and their own personal attitude on the same issues (see also Quist & Crano, 2003).

Yet, it is possible that the similarity-attraction relationship holds not only at the level of attitudes, but also at the more basic level of traits. Personality traits are enduring dispositions which differ from attitudes in several ways (Allport, 1937). Whereas attitudes are dispositional evaluations, namely likes and dislikes towards specific objects, events, and behaviors, traits are tendencies to show consistent patterns of thought, feelings, and actions across time and situations. Whereas traits operate as quasi automatic habitual behaviours, attitudes entail conscious and intentional processes more than traits.

As traits have recently gained a renewed interest among scholars investigating personal determinants of political choice (Caprara, Schwartz, Capanna, Vecchione, & Barbaranelli, 2006; Funk, 1999; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sullo-

way, 2003; McCrae, 1996), it is useful to determine whether the similarity-attraction effect that has been documented with attitudes also holds in the domain of basic personality traits.

Perceived Similarity in Traits between Voters and Political Candidates

In recent years, the personality traits of both voters and candidates have become a focus of political discourse (Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004). Findings have shown that candidates' perceived traits may account for a considerable portion of variance in preference accorded by voters, often more than issues and programs (Funk, 1999; Jones & Hudson, 1996; Pierce, 1993). Other findings have shown that political choices depend on voter's traits, even more than on sociodemographic factors such as sex, income, and education (Caprara et al., 2006; Ricolfi, 2002).

Recently, Caprara and Zimbardo (2004) outlined a congruency model of political preference that highlights the congruencies between voters' traits, programs of favored political coalitions, and personalities of political leaders. According to Caprara and Zimbardo (2004), a powerful congruency principle may serve as a humanizing glue linking affect, cognition, and action at different stages of political transactions, underscoring commonalities of feelings, thoughts, and values and similarities of partisans, while accentuating the contrast with opponents. First, it operates in matching self-reported personalities of voters with the ideology and programs of their preferred coalitions. Next, it operates in how voters activate schematic knowledge to appraise politicians' personalities, selecting those attributes perceived to be most relevant to the political office, and then preferring those candidates whose personal characteristics match at best their political ideals. Further, it operates in how self-reported personalities of leaders and followers are similar but differ from their opponents. The more this congruency principle operates the more the distinctive characteristics of leaders and followers of opposite coalitions can be traced back to common values at the roots of ideals of their respective political agendas. Along these stages the traits that voters use to present themselves and to organize their knowledge of politicians are critical to accord their feelings and cognitions, to anchor their impressions, to infer politicians' motives and values, and to justify their own preferences.

Several studies conducted in Italy found that center-right voters scored higher than center-left voters on traits associated with dominance, competitiveness, activity (Energy/extraversion), precision, and persistence (Conscientiousness), consistent with their conservative political orientation and their focus on business and economic issues. On the other hand, center-left voters scored higher than voters from rival coalitions on traits associated to sensitivity towards others (Agreeableness), open-mindedness, and tolerance of diversity (Openness), consistent with their communitarian and pluralistic political orientation (Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Zimbardo, 1999; Caprara et al., 2006).

In the United States, as in Italy, liberals scored higher in Openness (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003; Jost, 2006; Jost et al., 2003; McCrae, 1996), whereas conservatives scored higher in Conscientiousness (Gosling et al., 2003; Jost, 2006). Thus, citizens who favour conservative and liberal leaders and platforms showed similar traits in Italy and the United States although, to a certain extent, some differences emerged. Whereas Agreeableness and Energy/Extraversion play a critical role in distinguishing the voters of the two main political coalitions in Italy, there is no convincing empirical evidence that these dimensions are associated with political orientation in the United States.

Similar patterns of differences in the Big Five were found among Italian politicians of opposite coalitions (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Consiglio, Picconi, & Zimbardo, 2003). Center-right politicians scored higher in Energy/Extraversion and Conscientiousness than center-left politicians, as previously reported for voters. No significant differences were found in Agreeableness, Openness, and Emotional stability.

Although similar patterns pointed to similarity between leaders and followers, this received little attention in the past. Preliminary findings were reported in a study of Caprara, Barbaranelli, and Zimbardo (2002), attesting to a greater similarity between voters' self-reported personality and their appraisals of politicians belonging to their preferred coalition than with their appraisals of politicians of the opposite coalition.

As Caprara and Zimbardo (2004) pointed to similarity in personality characteristics that are reported and perceived as critical in strengthening the bonds between voters, parties, and candidates, the three studies reported here have been conceived to explore similarity between voters' self-reported personalities and voters' appraisal of political leaders in greater detail than in previous studies.

These studies were conducted in different countries (one in Italy and two in the United States) and examined voters' personality evaluations of politicians competing for different offices (Romano Prodi and Silvio Berlusconi as leaders of two major coalitions in Italy, George W. Bush and John F. Kerry as candidates for the U.S. presidency in the 2004 election). When the Italian study was conducted, the center-right coalition campaigned mostly on entrepreneurship and business freedom and was headed by Silvio Berlusconi, an entrepreneur who in his speeches and campaign propaganda cultivates and conveys the image of an active, energetic, charismatic leader. The center-left coalition, instead, campaigned mostly on solidarity and social welfare and was headed by Romano Prodi, a University Professor who expresses strong concern for social justice and emphasizes pluralism and equality (Bobbio, 1994; Caciagli & Corbetta, 2002; Veneziani, 1994). The U.S. study was conducted at the peak of the presidential political campaign, when the media coverage of the two main candidates, Republican President George W. Bush and Democratic presidential candidate John F. Kerry, was very high.

As in previous studies, the Five Factor Model (De Raad, 2001; Goldberg, 1993) provided the appropriate taxonomy to organize individual differences in personality traits of voters as self-reported and of politicians as perceived by voters.

Then, in accordance with the above findings attesting to the similarity–attraction hypothesis and with Caprara and Zimbardo’s congruency model (2004), we posited two hypotheses. First, we predicted that people will prefer politicians whose personality they perceive as most similar to their own. This may occur either because people like others whom they perceive as being similar to themselves or because they find it assuring to believe that the people they like are similar to themselves. The second hypothesis was that perceived similarity would be higher in traits that previous studies have shown to be most distinctive of voters and of leaders of opposite coalitions as well as most congruent with the political programs they endorse. Thus, in Italy, we expected higher similarity in markers of Energy/Extraversion between center-right voters and Berlusconi, and higher similarity in markers of Agreeableness between center-left voters and Prodi. In fact, Energy/Extraversion and Agreeableness were the traits that in previous studies mostly distinguished voters of opposite coalitions and their leaders (Caprara & Barbaranelli, 1996).

Similarly, in the United States, we expected that markers of Openness would exhibit higher similarity between Kerry and his voters, since Openness is a trait that previous research has shown to be most distinctive of liberals, as well as most congruent with the public image of Kerry as conveyed by the media. We also expected higher similarity in markers of Conscientiousness between Bush and his voters, mostly due to previous studies reporting higher Conscientiousness in conservatives than in liberals.

To summarize, in this paper we present three studies aimed at examining the effect of similarity between candidates and voters on political preferences. In the first study we examined perceived similarity in traits between voters and leaders of the two major Italian coalitions (Prodi and Berlusconi). In the second and third studies we tried to replicate our findings in a different cultural context (the United States), and with different political figures (Bush and Kerry). Study one and two have been conducted on a large number of subjects, using a cross-sectional design. In the third study, personality ratings (self and politicians) and voting behavior were provided at different times (before and after the election, respectively). This longitudinal study allows us to test prospectively whether perceived similarities between the self and the candidates would predict political preferences.

Study 1

Method

Sample and procedures. A set of 25 personality adjectives was administered to 1,675 Italian voters. The data were collected in the month of May 2004, when

Berlusconi was the prime minister. After the study was completed, in April 2006, center-left won the parliamentary elections and its leader Romano Prodi succeeded Silvio Berlusconi as Italy's prime minister. Participants were recruited by about 200 psychology majors as part of a course assignment in Multivariate Statistical Analysis at the University of Rome. The students were free to participate in the research and received course credit. Each student, acting as a research assistant, was briefed on the general aims of the research, instructed how to administer the personality adjectives, and asked to collect data from six people. The sample was quite diverse with respect to gender, age, education, and political orientation. Mean age of the sample was 44.71 (with a large standard deviation of 17.59), with 45.4% males and 54.6% females. About 23.8% of the sample had a degree, 55.5% completed senior high school, 12.9% completed junior high school, and 7.8% had only an elementary school education. Participants also indicated which coalition they voted for in the 2001 election. About 32.1% of the sample represented the center-right coalition, 48.6% the center-left coalition, 14.8% voted for parties other than the two main coalitions, and 4.5% did not vote.

Participants gave self-descriptions of their own traits and their perceptions of traits of one Italian political figure: Silvio Berlusconi *or* Romano Prodi, the leaders of the center-right coalition and the center-left coalition, respectively. The order of self-evaluation and evaluations of politicians was counterbalanced. In subsample *a* ($n = 485$), subjects first rated their own personality and then provided their perception of Berlusconi; in subsample *b* ($n = 411$), subjects first provided their perception of Berlusconi and then rated their own personality; in subsample *c* ($n = 393$), subjects first rated their own personality and then provided their perception of Prodi; in subsample *d* ($n = 386$), participants first provided their perception of Prodi and then rated their own personality.¹

Measures

Traits. The 25 adjectives that were used were based on a list that had previously been identified in the Italian lexicon as being among the most frequently used to describe human personality and also the most representative of each of the dimensions of the Big Five (Caprara & Perugini, 1994). The list included five markers each of: *Energy/Extraversion* (happy, determined, dynamic, energetic,

¹ To investigate the influence of the order in which each target (self and politician) was evaluated, we compared similarity scores obtained on subsample *a* (Self-Berlusconi) with scores obtained on subsample *b* (Berlusconi-Self); similarly, we compared scores obtained on sample *c* (Self-Prodi) with scores obtained on sample *d* (Prodi-Self). No significant differences were found across subsamples; that is, similarity with Prodi and Berlusconi was not influenced by the order in which the measures were presented. Moreover, no interaction emerged between order of presentation and political preferences of participants. These results provide evidence that the perceptions of similarity was not influenced by the order of presentation. Our findings are in accordance with a recent review conducted by Robbins and Krueger (2005), that revealed that the order in which self-judgments and other-judgments are made have no discernable effects on perceived similarity.

active); *Agreeableness* (cordial, generous, loyal, sincere, unselfish); *Conscientiousness* (efficient, scrupulous, precise, conscientious, diligent); *Emotional stability* (optimistic, self-confident, solid, relaxed, calm); and *Intellect/Openness to experience* (sharp, creative, innovative, modern, informed). Each adjective was rated for how characteristic it was of each target on a 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much so) scale.

In the present sample, principal axis factor analyses with Oblimin rotation of the self-reported adjectives revealed a five-factor structure, one that closely resembled that expected based on previous research on the Big Five. The five-factor model explained 56.02% of the total variance. Correlations among empirical factor scores derived from the EFA solutions and the simple summation of the adjectives related to each factor were high for all factors, being .97 for Energy/Extraversion, .97 for Agreeableness, .91 for Conscientiousness, .96 for Emotional stability, and .91 for Openness. On the other hand, personality judgments of each political candidate required only two factors. One factor was a blend of Energy/Extraversion and Openness, while the other factor was a blend of Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Emotional stability. These factors explained 45.18% of the total variance for Berlusconi and 45.96% for Prodi. Thus, there is no one-to-one correspondence in the dimensionality of personalities of the targets evaluated. Whereas the self data revealed a five-factor structure, only two factors were needed to characterize evaluations of politicians' personalities. These findings emerged also in several past studies, conducted within different cultural contexts and with different political figures (Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Zimbardo, 1997; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Fraley, & Vecchione, in press). Accordingly, personalities of voters and politicians, as well as perceived similarity between them, have been examined at a lower-level of aggregation, using the single adjectives as unit of analysis.

Results and Discussion

Differences among Voters

Differences among voters were estimated performing a *t* test for independent samples. Scores on each adjective served as dependent variables and political preferences (center-right or center-left) as the design variable. Overall, six adjectives showed significant differences among voters of opposite coalitions ($p < .01$). The average Cohen's *d* of the significant effects was .13 ($SD = .06$). Two markers of Energy/Extraversion (Determined and Active), one marker of Emotional stability (Self-confident), and one marker of Conscientiousness (Precise) were higher in center-right voters than in center-left voters. In contrast, two markers of Agreeableness (Generous and Unselfish) were higher in center-left voters than in center-right voters. These findings accord with previous results, showing that those who endorse the platform of the center-right coalition score higher than their political counterparts on Energy and Conscientiousness, whereas those who preferred the

center-left coalition showed higher degrees of Agreeableness. These findings are congruent also with the distinctive ethos of the two main coalitions, with the center-right emphasizing individual freedom and achievements and the center-left emphasizing social justice and solidarity. In the present sample, center-left voters were also higher in the markers of Openness, but not significantly. The weakness of this finding may reflect the particular difficulty, noted by McCrae (1990), of capturing the facets of Openness with single adjectives.

Differences in Evaluations of Politicians' Traits

Differences in evaluations of Berlusconi and Prodi were estimated performing independent *t* tests on each adjective. Scores on adjectives served as dependent variables and politician evaluated (Berlusconi or Prodi) as design variable. Respondents perceived the two politicians as quite different. Overall, 23 adjectives showed significant differences among the two candidates ($p < .001$). The average Cohen's *d* of the significant effects was .58 (SD = .23). The main differences involved the dimensions of Energy/Extraversion and Agreeableness. All the markers of Energy/Extraversion, three markers of Openness (Innovative, Creative, and Modern), two markers of Conscientiousness (Efficient and Precise), and two markers of Emotional stability (Self-confident and Optimist) were perceived as higher in Berlusconi than Prodi. On the other hand, all the markers of Agreeableness, three markers of Conscientiousness (Scrupulous, Conscientious, and Diligent), two markers of Emotional stability (Relaxed and Calm), and one marker of Openness (Informed) were perceived as higher in Prodi than Berlusconi. These results are quite congruent with the stereotypic images of the two politicians as conveyed by media: with the personality of Berlusconi mostly associated with successful entrepreneurship and plenty of energy and the one of Prodi mostly associated with academic scholarship, friendliness, and wisdom.

To examine the extent in which respondents of different political preference converge in their assessment of the personalities of specific candidates, we calculated agreement of judgments across three groups of subjects: center-left voters, center-right voters, and people who did not vote for either coalition. Agreement has been estimated using McCrae coefficients of profile agreement (r_{pa} , McCrae, 1983). This coefficient resembles a Pearson correlation but, as opposed to it, is sensitive to the tendency to give consistently higher or lower scores on each variable. The profile agreement coefficient takes into account the distances between profile elements but gives more weight to agreement in extremes scores, because they are much less likely to differ due to chance (McCrae, Stone, Fagan, & Costa, 1998). Higher scores indicate higher agreement between the observers.²

² One should note that agreement is not accuracy; that is, high scores on r_{pa} indicate high agreement between the groups on a number of traits, but their evaluations of the target are not necessarily accurate.

Table 1. Agreement across political preferences in the assessment of the personalities of Berlusconi and Prodi

Berlusconi	Center-right voters	Center-left voters	Voters of other parties
Center-right voters	–		
Center-left voters	.65 (.90)	–	
Voters of other parties	.66 (.92)	.69 (.99)	–
Prodi			
Center-right voters	–		
Center-left voters	.64 (.87)	–	
Voters of other parties	.68 (.96)	.66 (.91)	–

Note. Coefficients of profile agreement (r_{pa}) are outside the parenthesis; Product-moment correlations (r) are within the parenthesis.

Supplementary analyses were undertaken using the product-moment correlation, a more common measure of agreement (Kenny, 1994), that in contrast to r_{pa} is sensitive only to the shape of the profiles (McCrae, 1983). Results showed a moderate level of agreement between the groups (see Table 1). Profile agreement coefficients were all higher than .60, ranging from to .64 to .69. Product-moment correlation ranged from .87 to .99. Not surprisingly, voters of rival coalitions (center-right and center-left) showed the lower level of agreement in the evaluations of both politicians. It is likely that voters tend to give positively biased evaluations of the leader of their preferred coalition and negatively biased evaluations of the leader of the opposite coalitions. This bias might lower the agreement between groups. These findings are consistent with a number of studies on ingroup favoritism, showing that people tend to associate positive attributes to ingroup and negative attributes to outgroup (Dovidio, Evans, & Tyler, 1986; Fiske, 2004; Perdue, Dovidio, Gurtman, & Tyler, 1990). In contrast, people who voted for parties other than the ones of the two main coalitions showed high levels of agreement; likely this group presents the less biased evaluations (neither positively or negatively) of both candidates.

To locate specific areas of agreement across voters of rival coalitions, an Index of Profile Agreement (I_{pa}) (McCrae, 1983) has been calculated for each adjective. As suggested by McCrae et al. (1998), negative values are taken to indicate a substantial difference (of at least one standard deviation) between the groups. Results are presented in Table 2. Generally speaking, only one adjective (e.g., Relaxed for Prodi) showed negative coefficients and thus a substantial disagreement. The adjectives with the higher agreement were Determined, Sincere, and Unselfish for Berlusconi, and Informed, Dynamic, and Calm for Prodi. One should note that there is a substantial heterogeneity in the agreement across the Five Factor; that is, adjectives of the same factor showed both low and high agreement. On average, Openness ($I_{pa} = .35$) and Conscientiousness ($I_{pa} = .36$) showed the lowest agreement for Berlusconi; Emotional stability ($I_{pa} = .30$) and Agreeableness ($I_{pa} = .39$) showed the lowest agreement for Prodi.

Table 2. Indexes of profile agreement (I_{pa}) between center-right voters and center-left voters

Adjectives		Politicians evaluated	
		Berlusconi	Prodi
Dynamic	E	.44	1.26
Relaxed	S	.30	-.30
Active	E	.70	.40
Sharp	O	.34	.18
Unselfish	A	1.16	.52
Optimistic	S	.84	.35
Innovative	O	.08	.58
Determined	E	1.22	.53
Solid	S	.33	.25
Calm	S	.27	.94
Creative	O	.32	.69
Happy	E	.27	.39
Scrupulous	C	.39	.39
Energetic	E	.43	.85
Generous	A	.79	.37
Efficient	C	.22	.20
Precise	C	.32	.54
Cordial	A	.36	.59
Conscientious	C	.57	.35
Self-confident	S	.78	.35
Sincere	A	1.19	.28
Diligent	C	.32	.52
Loyal	A	.87	.18
Modern	O	.32	.76
Informed	O	.72	1.84

Note. E = Energy/Extraversion; A = Agreeableness;

C = Conscientiousness; S = Emotional stability; O = Openness. For Berlusconi, mean I_{pa} was .61 for E, .88 for A, .36 for C, .57 for S and .35 for O. For Prodi, mean I_{pa} were .69 for E, .39 for A, .40 for C, .30 for S and .81 for O.

Perceived Similarity between Voters and Candidates

To measure similarity, an index was created that represented the similarity between the self and Berlusconi and one that represented the similarity between the self and Prodi. First, perceived dissimilarity was computed by using the generalized Euclidean distance measure, d (Cronbach & Gleser, 1953) between the personality ratings of the self and the politician in question. This index is a function of absolute difference scores. To facilitate the interpretation, we converted these distance or dissimilarity scores into similarity scores, ranging from 0

(not similar at all) to 1 (completely similar). Specifically, Euclidean distances were transformed into a range from 0 to 1 by using the following equation: $\delta = d/d_{\max}$, where δ is the normalized index and d is the raw index. Following this, we converted these distance or dissimilarity scores to similarity scores by subtracting δ from 1. Similarity scores were calculated both at an overall level, averaging scores across all 25 adjectives, and for each single adjective. Using those scores, we performed t tests for independent samples to determine whether voting for a candidate's coalition was associated with greater similarity to that candidate's personality. We conducted separate analyses for people who voted for the center-right coalition, people who voted for the center-left coalition, and people who either did not vote for either coalition or did not vote at all. Trait similarity served as dependent variable and politician evaluated (Prodi or Berlusconi) as design variable.

As expected, voters were most likely to see themselves as similar to the political leader of their preferred coalition. Center-right voters were more likely to see themselves as similar to Berlusconi ($M = .68$), the leader of the center-right, than to Prodi ($M = .62$), the leader of the center-left, with respect to a variety of personality traits, $t(423) = 5.13, p < .001, d = .50$. Using scores on single adjective, 13 significant differences emerged. The average Cohen's d of the significant effects was .41 ($SD = .10$). In the following, we discussed the results only for the adjectives with a medium to high effect size, according to the Cohen's benchmark (Cohen, 1988). A medium effect size emerged with regard to four markers of Energy/Extraversion, such as Happy ($t = 5.61, p < .001, d = .55$), Active ($t = 5.54, p < .001, d = .54$), Dynamic ($t = 4.42, p < .001, d = .48$), and Determined ($t = 4.62, p < .001, d = .45$), and one marker of Openness, such as Modern ($t = 5.00, p < .001, d = .49$). Cohen's d for each adjective is presented in Figure 1.

Similarly, center-left voters were more likely to see themselves as similar to Prodi ($M = .70$) than to Berlusconi ($M = .56$), $t(643) = 15.35, p < .001, d = 1.23$. Using scores on single adjective, 19 significant differences emerged. The average Cohen's d of the significant effects was .66 ($SD = .45$). A large effect size emerged with regard to four markers of Agreeableness, such as Sincere ($t = 19.55, p < .001, d = 1.62$), Loyal ($t = 19.24, p < .001, d = 1.60$), Unselfish ($t = 13.98, p < .001, d = 1.16$), and Generous ($t = 12.25, p < .001, d = 1.02$), and one marker of Conscientiousness, such as Conscientious ($t = 14.67, p < .001, d = 1.22$). A medium effect size emerged with regard to four markers of Conscientiousness, such as Efficient ($t = 9.12, p < .001, d = .76$), Scrupulous ($t = 8.53, p < .001, d = .71$), Diligent ($t = 7.34, p < .001, d = .61$), and Precise ($t = 5.67, p < .001, d = .47$), one marker of Agreeableness, such as Cordial ($t = 6.44, p < .001, d = .53$) and one marker of Openness, such as Sharp ($t = 5.56, p < .001, d = .46$). Results are summarized in Figure 2.

Participants who either did not vote for either coalition or did not vote at all were not likely to see themselves as similar to either candidate, $t(254) = 1.87, p = .06, d = .16$.

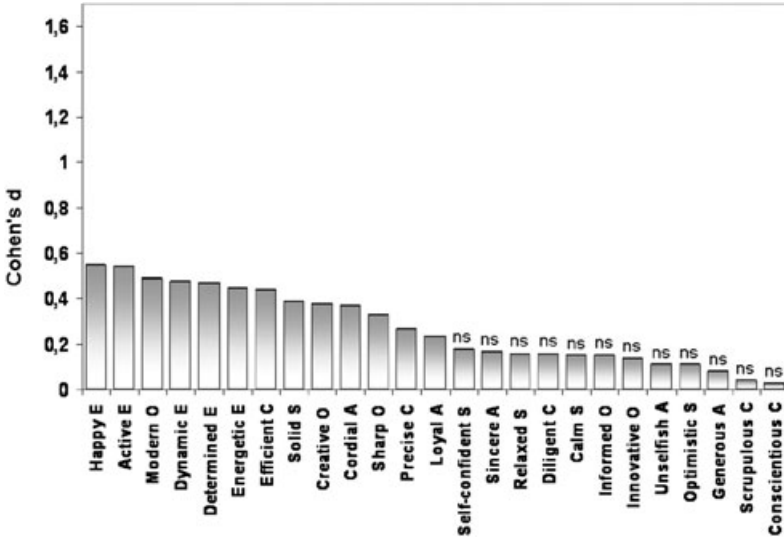


Figure 1. Similarity between Berlusconi and center-right voters.

Note: E = Energy/Extraversion; A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness; S = Emotional stability; O = Openness.

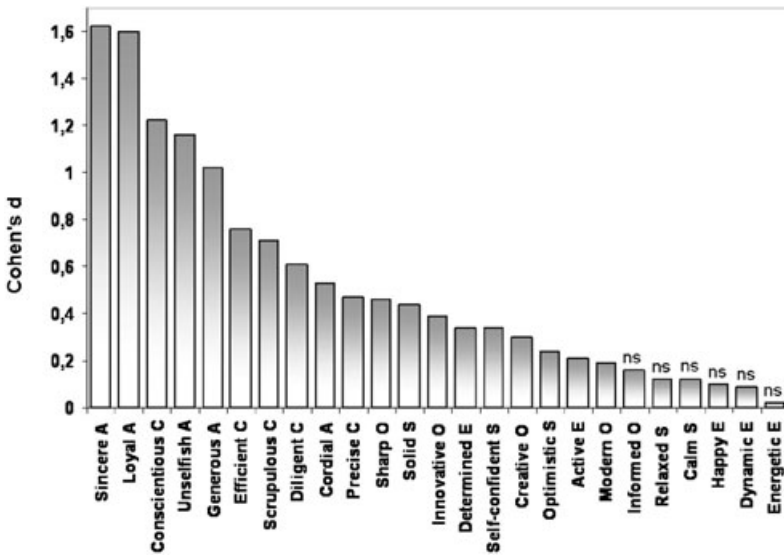


Figure 2. Similarity between Prodi and center-left voters.

Note: E = Energy/Extraversion; A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness; S = Emotional stability; O = Openness.

Study 2

Methods

Subjects and procedure. A set of 25 personality adjectives was administered to 6,094 American voters. The data were collected on the Web on September and October 2004 through a site designed “to assess your personality, as well as the personalities of George W. Bush and John F. Kerry.” The majority of participants (61%) reached the site through Andrew Sullivan’s web log (<http://www.andrewsullivan.com>); the remaining participants learned about the site through word of mouth, other web logs, and the primary hosting site, <http://www.yourpersonality.net>, which contains a variety of nonpolitical web studies about personality and relationships.

The average age of the sample was 37.47 ($SD = 12$). Seventy-eight percent of the sample were men, 22% women; 5,094 were Caucasian/white, 84 were African American, and the remainder were of other ethnicities. Participants first rated their own personality and then provided their perceptions of the personalities of *both* Bush and Kerry. The order in which the candidates were evaluated was randomized across participants. Subjects also indicated which candidate they intended to vote for in the November 2004 election. Thirty-nine percent of the sample indicated the intention to vote for Bush, 53% for Kerry, 8% for neither candidate.

Measures

Traits. Each participant evaluated his or her own personality and that of Bush and Kerry using the same list of 25 adjectives reported in study 1. The 25 adjectives were presented in a random order for each participant. As in study 1, whereas the self data revealed a five-factor structure, only two factors were needed to characterize evaluations of politicians’ personalities. Principal axis factor analyses with Oblimin rotation of the self-reported adjectives revealed a five-factor structure, explaining 33.70% of the total variance. The five factors closely resembled those expected based on previous research on the Big Five. The correlations among empirical factor scores derived from the EFA solutions and the simple summation of the adjectives related to each factor were high for all factors, being .96 for Energy/Extraversion, .96 for Agreeableness, .93 for Conscientiousness, .90 for Emotional stability, and .93 for Openness.

On the other hand, personality judgments of each political candidate required only two factors. These factors explained 44.72% of the total variance for Kerry and 42.92% for Bush. For Kerry, as already for Berlusconi and Prodi in study 1, one factor was a blend of Energy/Extraversion and Openness, while the other factor was a blend of Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Emotional stability. For Bush, one factor was a blend of Energy/Extraversion, Emotional stability, and

Agreeableness, while the other factor was a blend of Openness, Conscientiousness, and some descriptors of Agreeableness.

Results and Discussion

Differences among Voters

Differences among voters were estimated performing a *t* test for independent samples. Scores on each adjective served as dependent variables and political preferences (intention to vote for Bush or Kerry) as the design variable. Overall, 16 adjectives showed significant differences among voters of Bush and voters of Kerry ($p < .01$). The average Cohen's *d* of the significant effects was .20 ($SD = .12$). Two markers of Energy/Extraversion (Determined and Happy), three markers of Conscientiousness (Scrupulous, Efficient, and Conscientious), and three markers of Emotional stability (Optimist, Solid, and Self-confident) were higher in voters of Bush than in voters of Kerry. In contrast, all markers of Openness (except Informed) were higher in voters of Kerry than in voters of Bush. Adjectives of Agreeableness split evenly between the two groups: Whereas voters of Bush reported high scores on Loyal and Sincere adjectives, voters of Kerry were higher on Generous and Unselfish adjectives.

Differences in Evaluations of Politicians' Traits

Differences in evaluations of Bush and Kerry were estimated performing paired *t* tests on each adjective. Scores on adjectives served as dependent variables and politician evaluated (Bush and Kerry) as design variable. All the adjectives showed significant differences among the two candidates ($p < .001$). The average Cohen's *d* of the adjectives was .37 ($SD = .26$). Four markers of Energy/Extraversion (Determined, Dynamic, Happy, and Energetic), four markers of Emotional stability (Relaxed, Optimistic, Solid, and Self-confident), and three markers of Agreeableness (Loyal, Sincere, and Cordial) were perceived as higher in Bush than in Kerry. On the other hand, all the markers of Openness and Conscientiousness, one marker of Energy/Extraversion (Active), one marker of Emotional stability (Calm), and two markers of Agreeableness (Generous and Unselfish) were perceived as higher in Kerry than in Bush.

To examine the extent in which respondents of different political preference converge in their assessment of the personalities of specific candidates, we calculated coefficients of profile agreement (McCrae, 1983) and product-moment correlations across voters of Bush, voters of Kerry, and people who had yet to decide how they would vote.

Results showed an acceptable level of correspondence across groups in the way in which the two candidates were evaluated (see Table 3). Profile agreement coefficients were all positive and higher than .55, ranging from to .56 to .68.

Table 3. Agreement across political preferences in the assessment of the personalities of Bush and Kerry

Bush	Voters of Bush	Voters of Kerry	Yet to decide
Voters of Bush	–		
Voters of Kerry	.61 (.80)	–	
Yet to decide	.67 (.94)	.68 (.96)	–
Kerry			
Voters of Bush	–		
Voters of Kerry	.56 (.70)	–	
Yet to decide	.67 (.95)	.64 (.87)	–

Note. Coefficients of profile agreement (r_{pa}) are outside the parenthesis; Pearson correlations (r) are within the parenthesis.

Product-moment correlations ranged from .70 to .96. These results are similar to those obtained in different studies and across different judges, as for example between self-reports and spouse ratings (McCrae et al., 1998). As already found in study 1, the lower agreement was found between voters of opponent candidates. To further explore the sources of disagreement between voters of Bush and voters of Kerry, the Index of Profile Agreement (I_{pa}) (McCrae, 1983) was calculated for each adjective. Results are presented in Table 4. Only two adjectives (e.g., Sincere for Bush and Solid for Kerry) showed a substantial disagreement. On the other hand, the adjectives with the higher agreement in perceiving Determined, Loyal, and Self-confident for Bush, and Informed, Self-confident, and Active for Kerry. On average, Emotional stability ($I_{pa} = .22$) and Agreeableness ($I_{pa} = .28$) showed the lowest agreement for Bush, Conscientiousness, ($I_{pa} = .24$) and Emotional stability ($I_{pa} = .28$) showed the lowest agreement for Kerry.

Perceived Similarity between Voters and Candidates

To measure perceived dissimilarity we used Euclidean distance between the personality ratings of the self and the politician in question. This index has been converted into a measure of similarity, and transformed into a range from 0 to 1, as in study 1. Similarity was calculated both at an overall level, averaging scores across all 25 adjectives, and for each single adjective. We performed paired t tests on these similarity scores to determine whether voting for a candidate was associated with greater similarity to that candidate's personality. Separate analysis were conducted for people who intended to vote for Bush, people who intended to vote for Kerry, and people who had yet to decide how they would vote. Trait similarity served as dependent variables and politician evaluated (Bush and Kerry) as design variable.

Results showed that people were most likely to see themselves as similar to the political candidate of their choosing. People who intended to vote for Bush, for

Table 4. Indexes of profile agreement (I_{pa}) between voters of Bush and voters of Kerry.

Adjectives		Politicians evaluated	
		Bush	Kerry
Dynamic	E	.30	.42
Relaxed	S	.17	.15
Active	E	.53	.84
Sharp	O	.70	.71
Unselfish	A	.26	.57
Optimistic	S	.75	.24
Innovative	O	.73	.62
Determined	E	1.12	.68
Solid	S	.13	-.07
Calm	S	.29	.31
Creative	O	.83	.42
Happy	E	.55	.24
Scrupulous	C	.37	.22
Energetic	E	.38	.10
Generous	A	.23	.42
Efficient	C	.36	.31
Precise	C	.80	.25
Cordial	A	.50	.33
Conscientious	C	.12	.06
Self-confident	S	.95	.90
Sincere	A	-.44	.10
Diligent	C	.28	.38
Loyal	A	.86	.25
Modern	O	.53	.09
Informed	O	.45	1.29

Note. E = Energy/Extraversion; A = Agreeableness;

C = Conscientiousness; S = Emotional stability; O = Openness. For Bush, mean I_{pa} was .57 for E, .28 for A, .39 for C, .22 for S and .65 for O. For Kerry, mean I_{pa} were .46 for E, .34 for A, .24 for C, .28 for S and .62 for O.

example, saw themselves as more similar to Bush ($M = .69$) than Kerry ($M = .55$) with respect to a variety of personality traits, $t(2076) = 42.33$, $p < .001$, $d = .93$. Using scores on single adjective, 18 significant differences emerged. The average Cohen's d of the significant effects was .37 ($SD = .26$). A large effect size emerged for two markers of Agreeableness, such as Sincere ($t = 57.64$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.00$) and Loyal ($t = 54.45$, $p < .001$, $d = .95$); a medium effect size emerged for two markers of Conscientiousness, such as Scrupulous ($t = 47.37$, $p < .001$, $d = .68$) and Conscientious ($t = 26.41$, $p < .001$, $d = .56$), and two markers of Emotional stability, such as Solid ($t = 30.59$, $p < .001$, $d = .64$) and Optimistic ($t = 25.61$, $p < .001$, $d = .54$). Results are summarized in Figure 3.

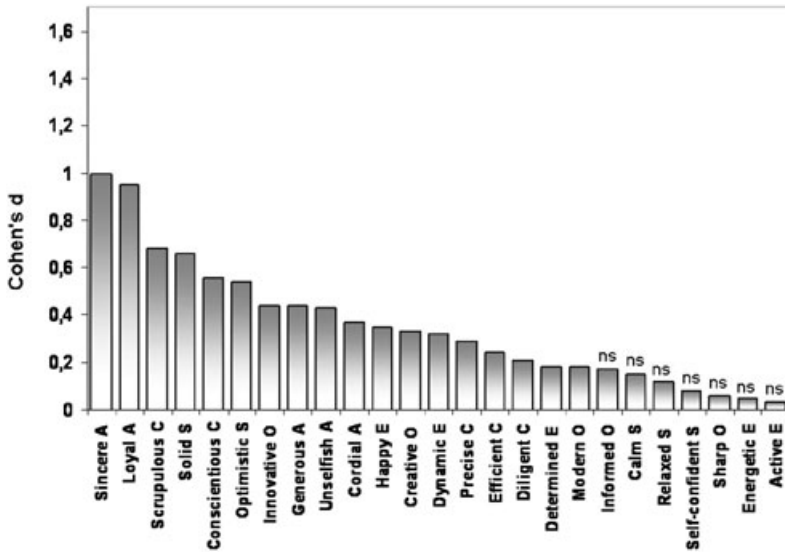


Figure 3. Similarity between Bush and his voters.

Note: E = Energy/Extraversion; A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness; S = Emotional stability; O = Openness.

On the other hand, people who planned to vote for Kerry saw themselves as more similar to Kerry ($M = .71$) than Bush ($M = .50$), $t(3001) = 87.75, p < .001, d = 1.60$. All but two adjectives showed a significant effect. Large effect sizes emerged with regard to three markers of Openness, such as Sharp ($t = 80.12, p < .001, d = 1.59$), Informed ($t = 98.27, p < .001, d = 1.41$), and Modern ($t = 47.37, p < .001, d = .92$), and one marker of Conscientiousness, such as Conscientious ($t = 53.48, p < .001, d = .98$). Medium effect sizes emerged for the other markers of Openness, Innovative ($t = 46.30, p < .001, d = .76$), and Creative ($t = 50.97, p < .001, d = .74$), two markers of Agreeableness, such as Generous ($t = 43.26, p < .001, d = .80$) and Unselfish ($t = 39.97, p < .001, d = .75$), and three markers of Conscientiousness, such as Scrupulous ($t = 47.41, p < .001, d = .71$), Precise ($t = 35.96, p < .001, d = .69$), and Diligent ($t = 24.74, p < .001, d = .48$). Results are summarized in Figure 4.

Finally, people who had yet to decide how they would vote in the election were not necessarily more likely to see themselves as similar to either candidate, $t(387) = .52, ns, d = .04$.³

³ As has been suggested by an anonymous referee, a comparative similarity index (similarity to one candidate minus similarity to the opposing candidate) can be also examined performing a t test for independent samples. In the U.S. study, where each subject evaluated both politicians, results showed that similarity to Bush minus similarity to Kerry is significantly different between people who planned to vote for Bush and people who planned to vote for Kerry, $t = 87.95(5077), p < .001$,

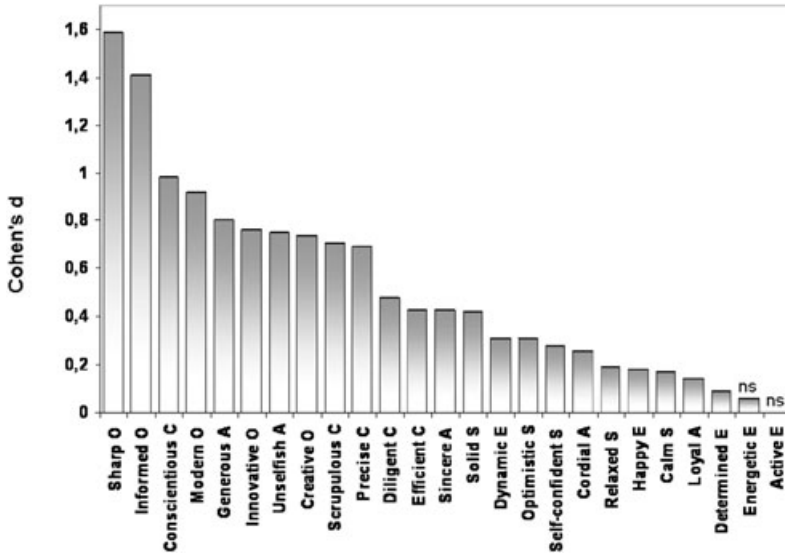


Figure 4. Similarity between Kerry and his voters.

Note: E = Energy/Extraversion; A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness; S = Emotional stability; O = Openness.

Study 3

Methods

The week prior to the November 2004 election participants rated *both* Bush and Kerry with respect to the Big Five personality traits using a 10-item measure developed by Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann (2003). Approximately one month previously, participants had rated themselves with respect to these same personality descriptors. A week after the election, participants reported which candidate they voted for. This sample allowed us to test prospectively whether perceived similarities between the self and the candidates would predict voting behavior. The sample was composed of 120 Americans who were part of an ongoing longitudinal study on personality stability and change. The average age of the sample was 21.8 (SD = 5.6). Sixty-eight percent of the sample was women; 84 were Caucasian/white, eight were African American, and the remainder were of other ethnicities. The perceived similarity between the personality of the self and the politicians was computed by converting Euclidean distance into a measure of similarity ranging

$d = 2.51$. Whereas the voters of Bush see themselves as more similar to Bush and less similar to Kerry ($M = .14$), the voters of Kerry see themselves as more similar to Kerry and less similar to Bush ($M = -.21$).

from 0 to 1, as in studies 1 and 2. Traits similarity was computed between the personality ratings of the self and the politician in question across all 10 personality items. As in the previous study, paired t tests were conducted on these similarity scores.

Results

People who ended up voting for Bush had previously seen themselves as similar to Bush and dissimilar to Kerry, $t(32) = 4.05$, $p < .05$, $d = .73$. Similarly, people who ended up voting for Kerry had previously rated themselves as being similar to Kerry and dissimilar to Bush, $t(78) = 7.20$, $p < .05$, $d = 1.21$. The eight participants who did not vote for either candidate did not see themselves as any more similar to Bush than Kerry, $t(7) = .92$, ns , $d = .39$.

Conclusion

These studies add unique information to the political psychology literature by exploring similarity in personality traits between voters and their political leaders at an individual level, using a large number of voters of two different political systems. Results showed that people saw their own personalities as being more similar to those of the candidates they prefer, with respect to a variety of traits. These findings held across countries (i.e., Italy and the United States), methods of assessment (either face-to-face or through the web), and instruments (trait adjectives and questionnaire items). The same conclusions held for reports of past voting behavior, reports of voting intentions, and prospective methods. These findings have important implications for both psychology and political science, as they attest to the generalizability of the similarity-attraction principle to the domain of politics and point to the role that traits play either in organizing political knowledge or in orienting political preferences.

In reality, traits are the units that allow voters to anchor their impressions of politicians and to link politicians' perceived personalities to their own personalities and thus are the elements through which the similarity-attraction principle operates in politics.

Whereas similarity is associated to political preference, our findings do not allow us to fully clarify the mechanism to which similarity is due. One may claim either that voters project into their preferred candidates the personality characteristics that are most distinctive of themselves and that likely they value most or that voters are attracted by candidates that show the personality characteristics that they value most.

While alternative mechanism may operate in concert, the relative agreement among opposite voters and nonvoters on politicians' more salient personality characteristics is a further element that contributes to corroborate the similarity between voters' personality and their leaders' personality.

In Italy, there was a reasonable agreement in appraising Silvio Berlusconi as more active, energetic, happy, determined, and dynamic than Romano Prodi; center-right voters scored higher in Energy/Extraversion than center-left voters and similarity between Berlusconi and his voters was particularly high in markers of Energy/Extraversion. Similarly, there was a certain agreement in appraising Romano Prodi as more friendly than Silvio Berlusconi; center-left voters scored higher in Agreeableness than center-right voters, and similarity between Prodi and his voters was particularly high in markers of Agreeableness.

It is worth noting that perceived similarity between Berlusconi and center-right voters ($d = 0.50$) was substantially lower with respect to their center-left counterparts ($d = 1.23$). Berlusconi is one of the world's wealthiest men; he controls Italy's three television stations and during the campaign had the most visible presence in the national media. It is likely that such uncommon characteristics may weaken follower's sense of identification with this candidate, decreasing perceived similarity between the personal features of Berlusconi and those of common citizens.

In the United States, John F. Kerry was unanimously appraised as more open minded than George W. Bush, Kerry's supporters showed a significantly higher degree of Openness than supporters of Bush, and the similarity between Kerry and his voters was particularly high in markers of Openness. Results for George W. Bush were less clear as similarity between Bush and his voters was particularly high in markers of Agreeableness (above all Sincere and Loyal), followed by markers of Conscientiousness. It is reasonable to guess that Bush most benefited from a kind of "positivity bias" (Fiske, 2004; Sears, 1983) that leads people to expect the U.S. president to be honest, loyal, and trustworthy. The same attributes were also higher in voters of Bush than in voters of Kerry.

One should note that, for all politicians, adjectives of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness such as Unselfish, Sincere, Conscientious, and Scrupulous accounts for a not negligible portion of variance. Agreeableness is the trait that people mostly project into others (Kenny, 1994); thus, it is reasonable to expect that, as people tend to present themselves as high in Agreeableness, namely with positive attributes like loyal and sincere, they tend to perceive preferred politicians high on that trait. Likely Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (that in evaluations of politicians collapsed into the same factor) are the traits that people most deny to the opponent's candidate.

Although it is impossible to establish the extent to which perceived similarity is due to projection, denial, or self-presentation, it is likely that the tendency to assimilate the preferred candidate's personality impression and description to one's own self appraisal and presentation may serve multiple functions and have multiple implications.

As most of the hypothesis posited in the premise was corroborated, one may conclude that the similarity-attraction principle also operates in accordance with the Caprara and Zimbardo (2004) congruency model of political preference: the

traits in which the similarity between voters and preferred candidates is higher are the ones that most distinguish voters of opposite coalitions and their leaders as well as the ones that are most congruent with their political platforms.

It is reasonable to predict that voters will prefer candidates that share their same worldviews and the same principles that guide their lives. Whereas people have direct access to the principles that orient their own life and accordingly tend to conform their behavior to their values, they may have access to others' values, motives, and intentions only indirectly, through inference from others' habitual behaviors, namely from their visible dispositions. The more voters acknowledge in their leaders the same behavioral tendencies that are most valuable for them, the more voters may easily extend such a similarity to inferred motives and values.

A match between voters' own personality and politicians' personality might further strengthen the bond between the voters and leaders, due to the effect of familiarity on likeability (Zajonc, 1980). The more the positive affect gets associated with voters' appraisal of their own personality and of their leaders because of egocentric favoritism or ingroup positivity biases (Capozza & Brown, 2000; Greenwald, 1980; Sears, 1983; Tajfel, 1981), the more similarity might serve as a catalyst that further strengthens consent and attraction.

At different times and in different contexts, assimilation and contrast mechanisms (Sherif & Hovland, 1961) may either exaggerate perceived similarities between partisans and their leaders or accentuate differences between voters and politicians of opposite parties or coalitions.

A major limitation of the present research needs to be acknowledged. In contrast to experimental studies that manipulate the degree of similarity, in the present research preexisting individual differences were examined. Due to the correlational nature of the study, results cannot be used to infer causality and inferences cannot be made about the processes through which these relations occur. Although we are aware that perceived similarity and political preference may have reciprocal influences, we have reason to believe that the main causal process goes from the former to the latter. While there is relative agreement among voters on politicians' more salient personality characteristics, self-reporting of basic personality traits is substantially stable over the life course (Costa & McCrae, 1997). Accordingly, it seems unlikely that voters would distort their own qualities, or that of politicians, as a cognitive justification for their vote. It is also important to note that in the third study self-evaluation and evaluations of politicians' personalities were measured before the election. This study's findings are incompatible with the possibility that the preference accorded to a given political figure may shape perceived similarity with their personality.

Future research and experimental studies should extend our knowledge on the various mechanisms through which the similarity-attraction principle may operate as well as on the various functions it may serve in politics.

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